



United States
Department of
Agriculture

Food and
Nutrition
Service

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SUBJECT: Area Eligibility Using Census Data

TO: Regional Directors
Special Nutrition Programs
All Regions

State Directors
Child Nutrition Programs
All States

The purpose of this memorandum is to allow additional flexibility in using census data for area eligibility determinations in the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP), Summer Food Service Program (SFSP), and the National School Lunch Program (NSLP) Summer Seamless Option (SSO). These additional flexibilities are effective immediately.

The Secretary may use census data in determining area eligibility for the SFSP and CACFP, as authorized in Sections 13(a)(1)(A)(II) and 17(f)(3)(A)(ii)(I)(aa), 42 USC 1761(a)(1)(A)(II) 1766(f)(3)(A)(ii)(I)(aa). CACFP and SFSP regulations provide more specifically that census data may be used to determine area eligibility for day care homes and certain SFSP sites and SSO sites. Eligibility is established when census data indicate that at least 50 percent of the children residing in the area are members of households that meet the income standards for free or reduced-price meals 7 CFR 226.15(f) and 225.6(c)(3)(B). Previous policy guidance has identified the Census Block Groups (CBGs) to be the geographical unit used to assess eligibility for CACFP, SFSP, and SSO when using census data CACFP 07-2012, SFSP 09-2012, *Eligibility Based on Census Data: 2012 Data Release*, February 13, 2013.

Ocassionally, a potential CACFP day care home or SSO site or a SFSP site is determined not to be in area eligible. In some cases, however, the homes or sites are located immediately adjacent to an eligible area. This proximity suggests that the children residing in the area from which the homes or site would most likely draw participants would have a likelihood of similar census demographics. In recognizing that likelihood and allowing additional flexibility in the use of census data to establish area eligibility, we can ensure area eligibility determinations accurately identify areas in which poor economic conditions exist. Upon publication of this memo, CACFP day care homes and SFSP and SSO sites may now be determined area eligible using either CBG's or Census Tracts. Census Tracts are geographical units that consist of one or more of the CBGs.

Additionally, based on analysis of the proposed location, with both State agency and Regional Office (RO) approval, up to three adjacent CBGs may be averaged, using a weighted average, to determine eligibility. In all CBGs being averaged, at least 40 percent of children must be eligible for free and reduced price meals. Census Tracts may not be combined.

Therefore, using these flexibilities, CACFP day care homes and SFSP and SSO sites are considered area eligible if:

- 50 percent or more of the children in a Census Tract are eligible for free or reduced-price school meals; or
- 50 percent or more of the children in a CBG are eligible for free or reduced-price school meals;
- The percentage of children eligible for free or reduced-price meals in up to three adjacent CBGs when averaged is 50 percent or more, provided that at least 40 percent of children in each of the combined CBGs are eligible for free and reduced price meals, as described above.

Data Availability

The availability of Census Tracts and combined CBGs to determine eligibility is effective with release of this memo. The data can be accessed through the 2013 folder on Partnerweb: <https://www.partnerweb.usda.gov/communities/cndpolicy2/CND%20Resources/Forms/PageList.aspx?RootFolder=%2fcommunities%2fcndpolicy2%2fCND%20Resources%2fCensus%20Area%20Eligibility%2f2013&FolderCTID=&View=%7b90D2EEBE-3FBB-4235-9583-F432F7D8FE6A%7d>.

The existing CBG .XLS (Excel) files contain eligibility information for every CBG by State. An additional Census Tract file contains the Census Tracts for the entire United States. Within the data files is an 'Eligible' column that can be used to determine eligibility for both Programs. This file is based on the same data as the 2013 data release (2007-2011 American Community Survey). A third file containing all of the data necessary to combine CBG's is available upon request.

Please note the important details about opening the file correctly in different formats. Instructions for determining eligibility using these data are provided in the same folder as the data. The instructions offer two different tools to determine eligibility: the Census Bureau tools and a map developed by the Food Research and Action Center (FRAC). The FRAC map is constructed from the same data files that are available on Partnerweb and may be used to determine eligibility.

Regional Directors
State Directors
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State agencies are reminded to distribute this information to Program operators immediately. Program operators should direct any questions regarding this memorandum to the appropriate State agency. State agency contact information is available at <http://www.fns.usda.gov/cnd/Contacts/StateDirectory.htm>. State agencies should direct questions to the appropriate FNS RO.

Original Signed

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